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Huff

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(54) **LEAK DIVERTER**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
E04D 13/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **137/312**; 137/357; 222/108; 52/302.1

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 137/312, 137/357; 222/108; 52/302.1
See application file for complete search history.

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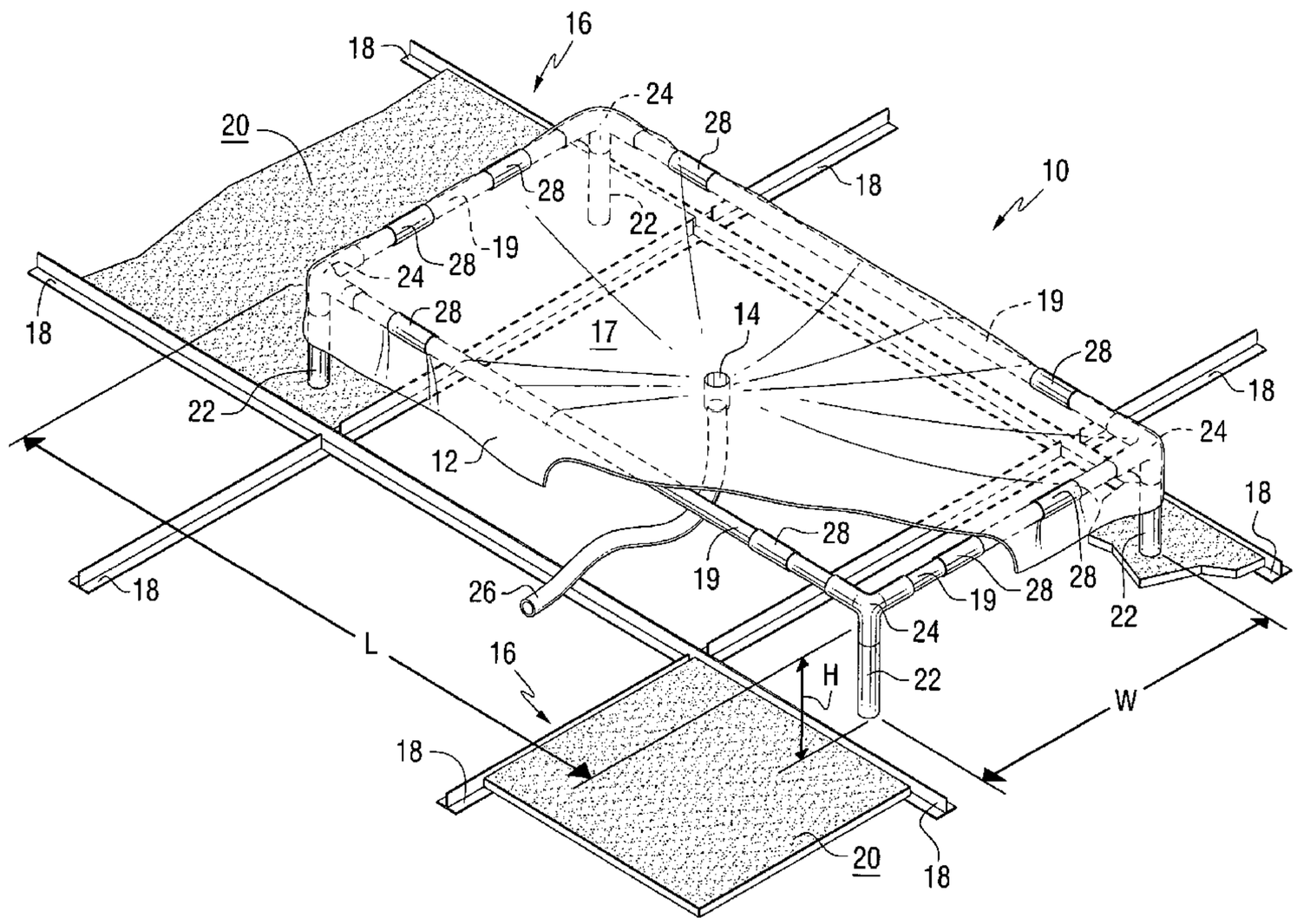
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling is disclosed. The leak diverter can comprise a liquid collection tray comprising a flexible or substantially rigid sheet of material. The leak diverter can have a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray. The leak diverter can comprise a perimeter frame and can be supported by a plurality of support members. The drain can be positioned to extend through either the liquid collection tray or the side barrier and can be positioned above the suspended ceiling. In one embodiment, the width of the leak diverter is less than the standard width of a suspended ceiling panel in order to facilitate installation of the diverter above the suspended ceiling. In another embodiment, the length of the leak diverter may be greater than the standard length or width of a suspended ceiling panel, and may straddle adjacent ceiling panels.

26 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



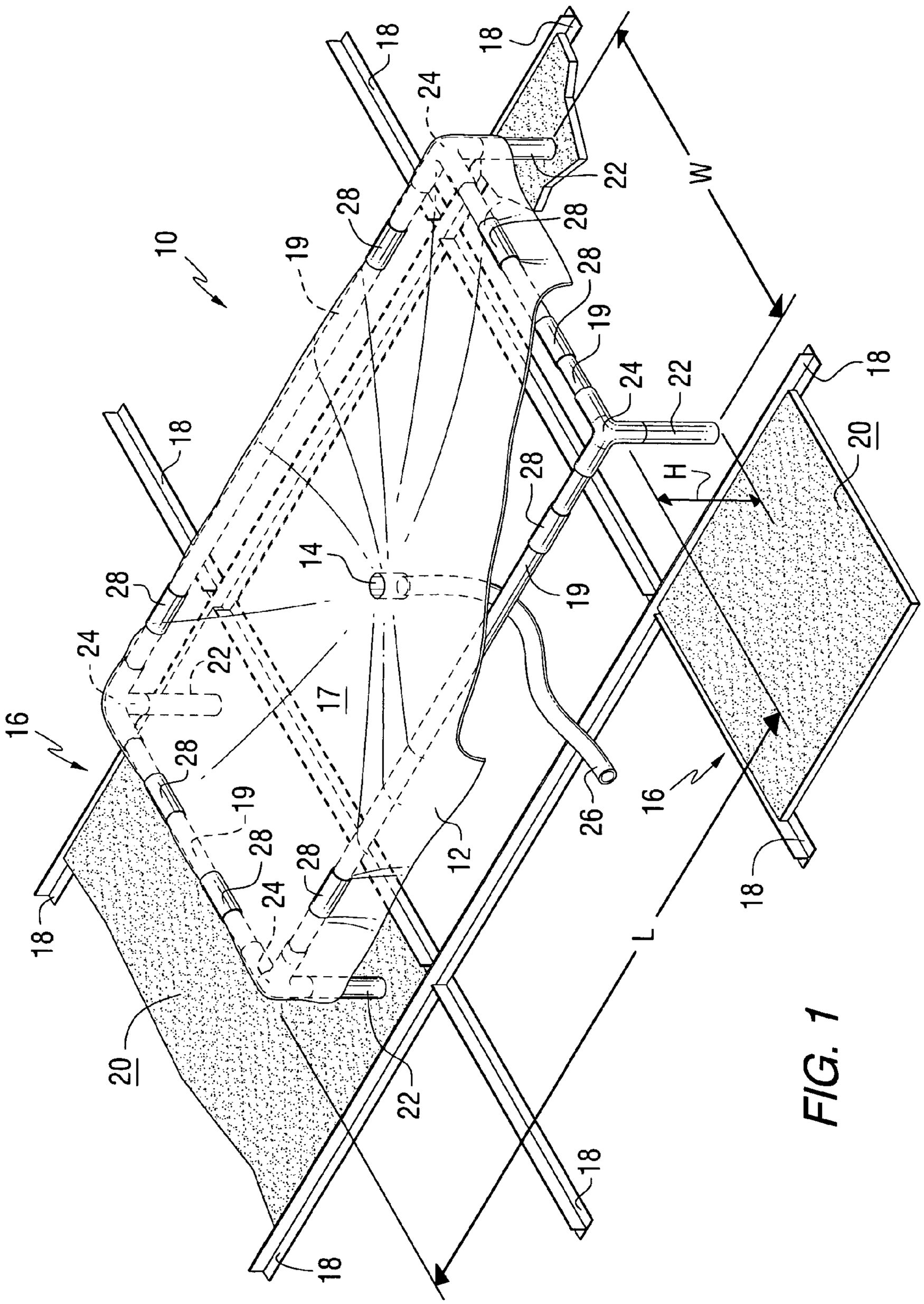


FIG. 1

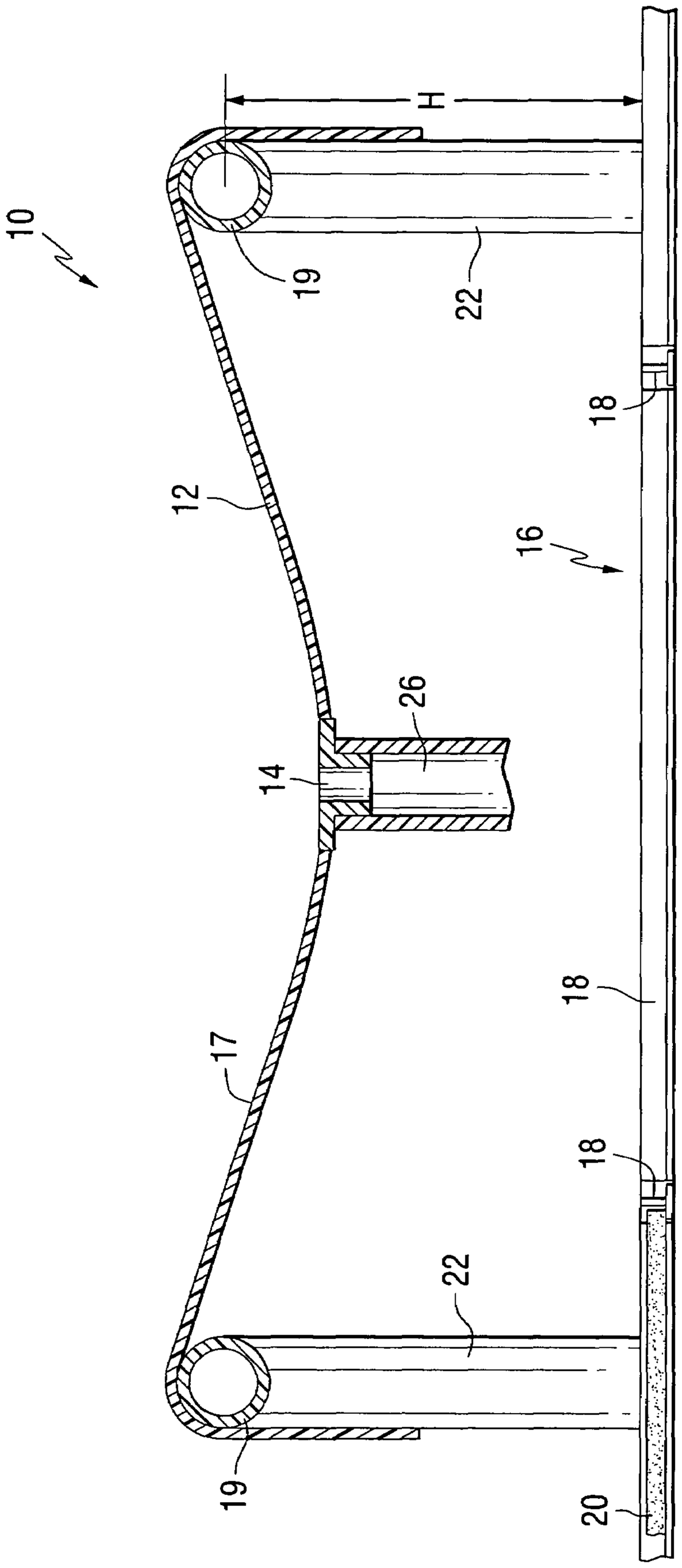


FIG. 2

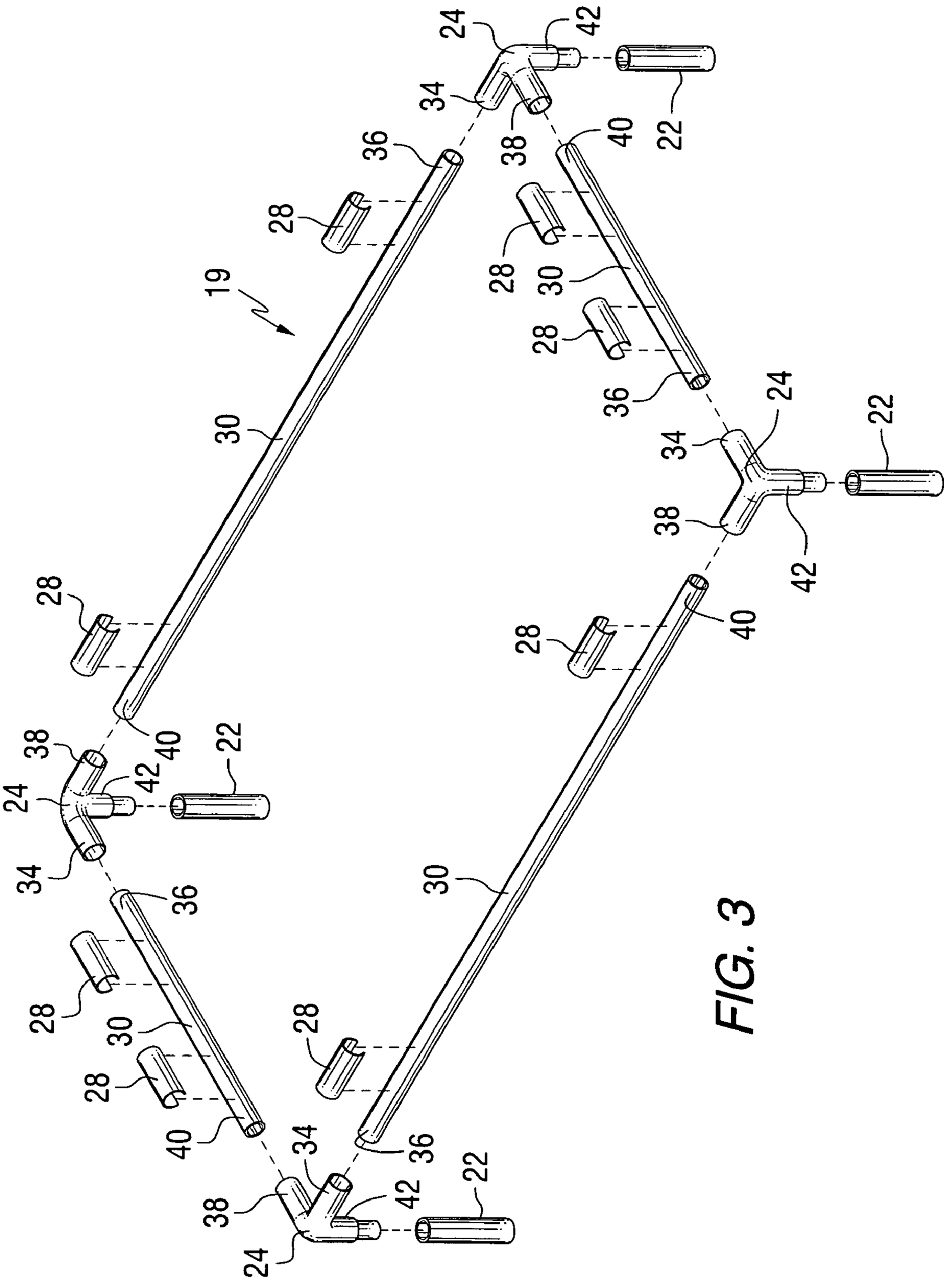


FIG. 3

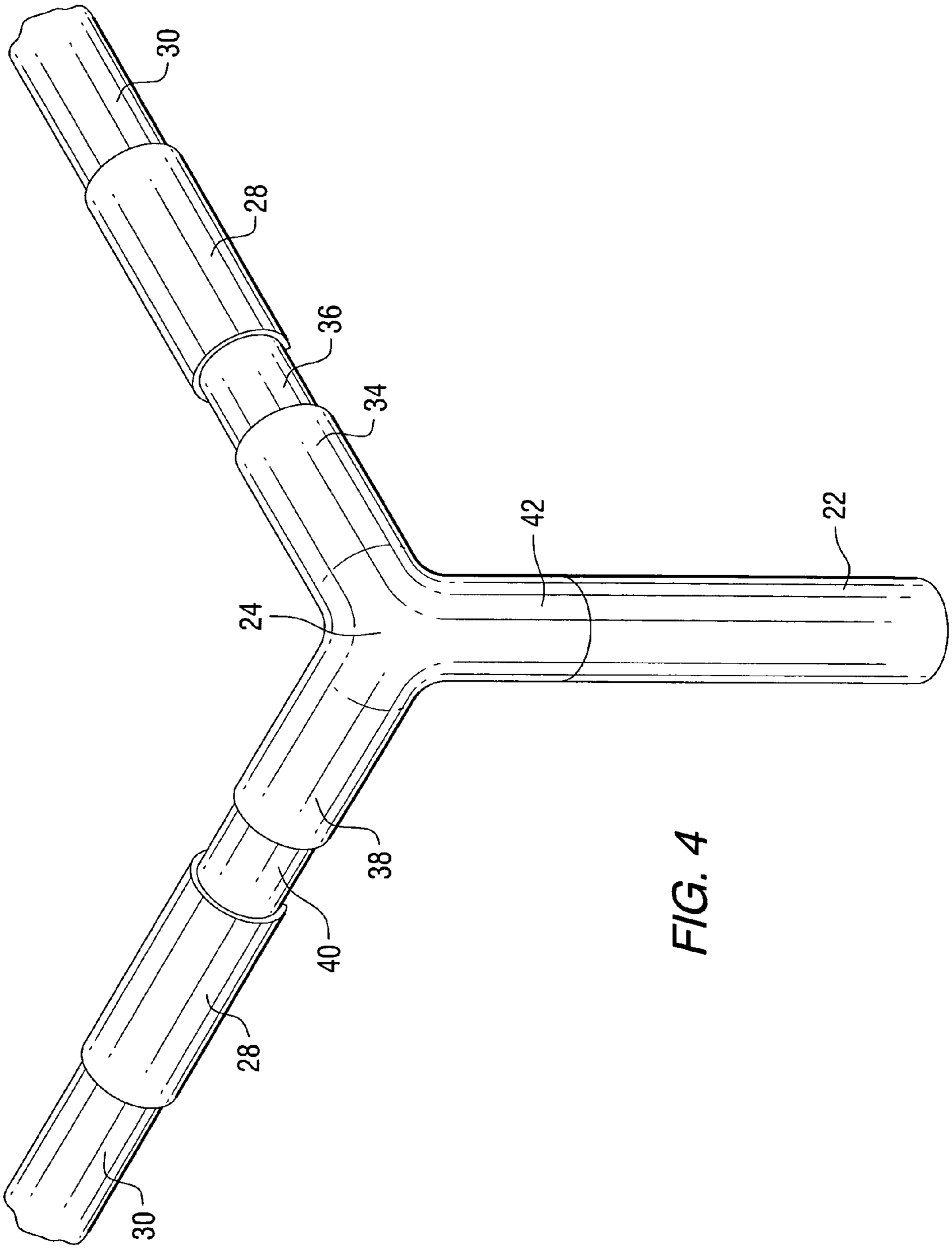


FIG. 4

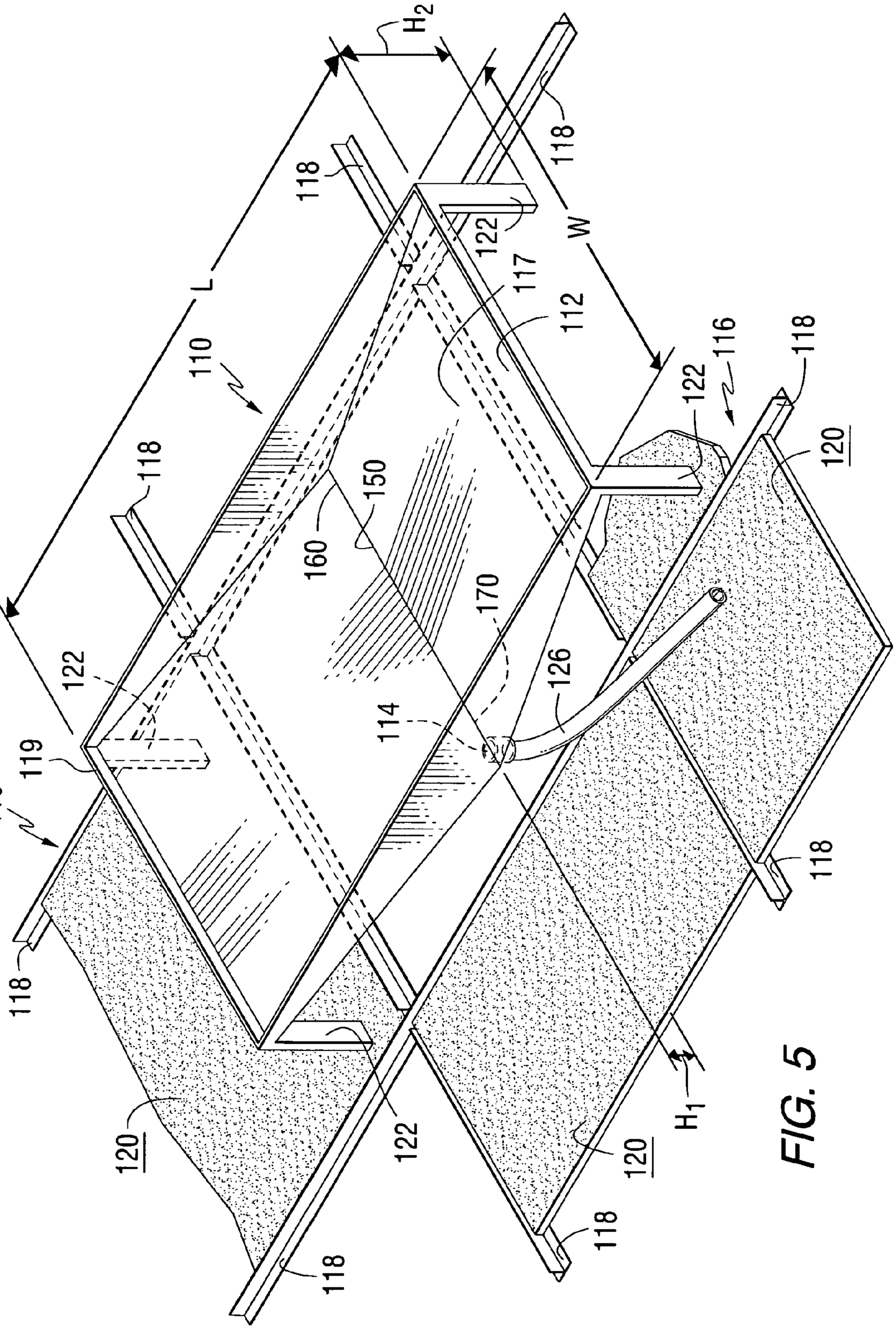

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FIG. 5

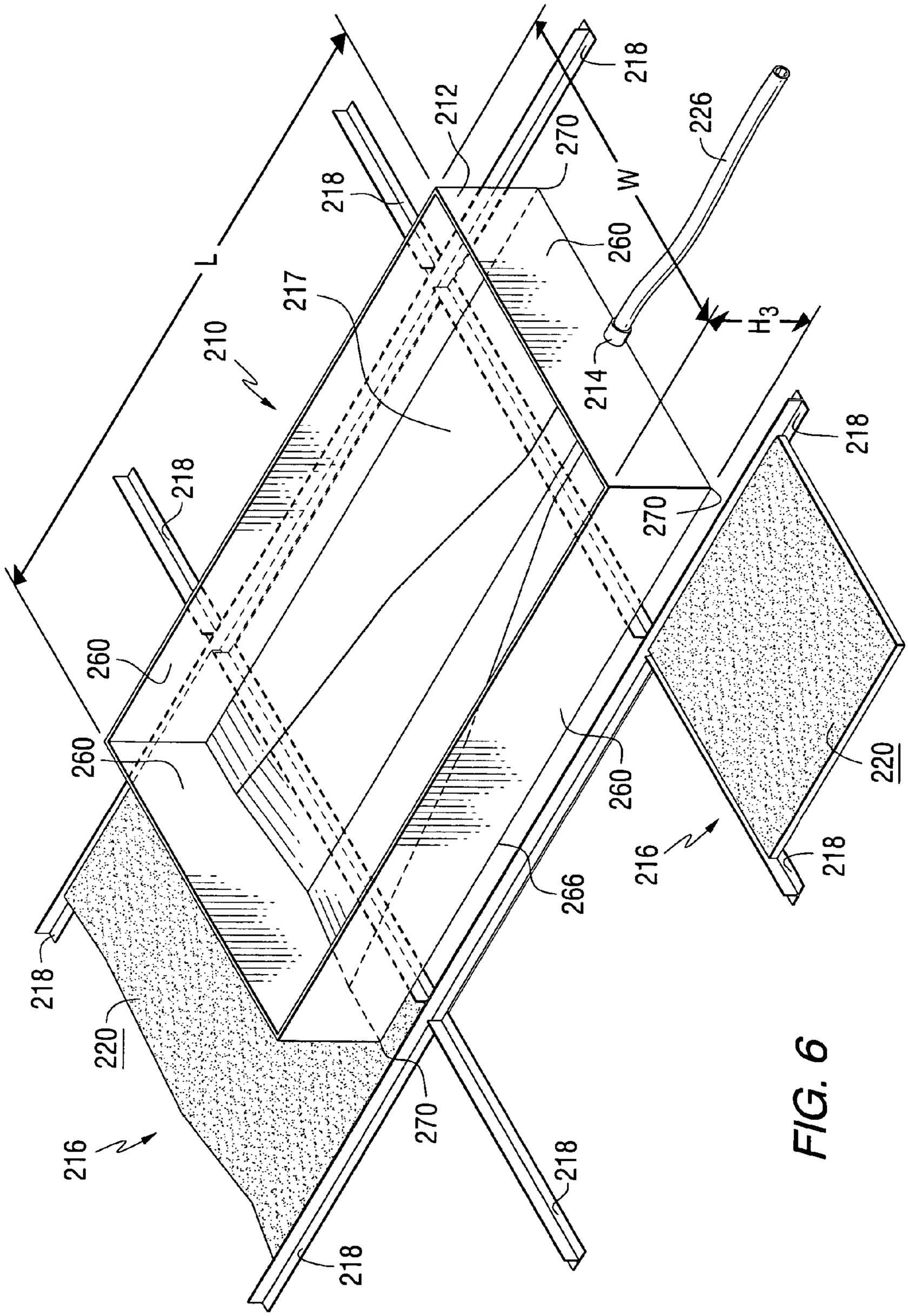

FIG. 6

LEAK DIVERTER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/709,719 filed Aug. 19, 2005, which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to leak diverters, and more particularly to leak diverters for positioning above suspended ceilings.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Many commercial, public, and private buildings are constructed to include a suspended ceiling, also known as a drop ceiling. A suspended ceiling comprises an interconnected support grid and removable ceiling panels, such as acoustic tiles, positioned within the support grid. Support wires can be used to support the suspended ceiling from a structural building ceiling or roof. The tiles are typically 24×24 inches or 24×48 inches, however, other sized may also be used. The use of a suspended ceiling creates a functional hidden space between the structural ceiling, such as the underside of the roof or intermediate floors, and the suspended ceiling, which is observable from the interior of a room. This hidden space is often utilized for the installation of sprinkler systems, fire and smoke warning systems, computer networking, electrical cables and conduits, heating, ventilating and cooling (HVAC) systems, and/or water piping systems. Normal usage of the above-mentioned elements, as well as openings in the building roof, faulty plumbing and/or condensation that forms on piping and/or HVAC system components, can result in the formation of leaks. Without a leak diverting device, leaks can contact the ceiling panels causing structural damage, discoloration and/or unwanted moisture. In certain situations, leaks can pass through the ceiling panels and drip onto the contents of the room interior.

Previous attempts to confine leaks have included systems placed within the interior of the room and positioned underneath a leaking ceiling tile, such as floor mounted structures comprising a telescoping pole and a collection bag positioned along the underside of a ceiling panel. Other leak confinement systems have included ceiling tiles designed to collect leakage. Examples of such tiles are disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,640,502 and 5,008,652. Although such designs may effectively handle many types of leaks, the tiles are visible from the interior of the room, must fit within the support grid, typically comprise visible hoses, and do not usually have the same appearance as conventional tiles or panels. Conventional deigns cannot be positioned along the perimeter of the ceiling, i.e. along cut ceiling tiles, and do not catch leaks that occur on the perimeter of the ceiling, such as leaks that occur above the grid itself.

There exists a need for a leak diverter that may be positioned above suspended ceilings that is inexpensive to produce, installs quickly, does not require a substantial retrofit to the existing suspended ceiling, and blends aesthetically with the occupied space below the suspended ceiling.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a leak diverter that includes a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to rest above a suspended ceiling and a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray. The liquid collection tray can be supported by a perimeter frame and/or a plurality of support members. The liquid collection tray can also comprise a side barrier for confining liquid within the tray. A drain may be positioned to extend through either the bottom or side of the liquid collection tray. A drain hose is typically connected to the drain, however, it will be appreciated herein that the leak diverter of the present invention can be used without a drain hose.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to rest above the suspended ceiling, and a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising a liquid collection tray and a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray, wherein the drain is structured and arranged to be positioned above the suspended ceiling.

A further objective of the present invention is to provide a leak diverting system comprising a suspended ceiling having an upper surface, and a leak diverter resting on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling.

It is yet a further objective of the present invention to provide a leak diverting system comprising a suspended ceiling, a liquid collection tray, and a drain in flow communication with liquid collection tray and positioned above the suspended ceiling.

These and other aspects of the present invention will be more apparent from the following description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a perspective view of a leak diverter positioned above a suspended ceiling, having a flexible sheet liquid collection tray and a drain extending therethrough, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **2** is a side view of the leak diverter of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **3** is an exploded perspective view of the substantially horizontal perimeter bars, corner elements, and support members of a leak diverter in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **4** is a perspective view of a portion of a leak diverter including an assembled corner element, two substantially horizontal perimeter bars, a support post, and two perimeter clamps in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **5** is a perspective view of a leak diverter positioned above a suspended ceiling, having a rigid liquid collection tray that is sloped to an integrally formed drain in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **6** is a perspective view of a leak diverter positioned above a suspended ceiling, comprising a rigid liquid collection tray having a sloped surface angled to an integrally formed drain within a side barrier in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIGS. **1-4** illustrate a leak diverter in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. **1**,

the leak diverter **10** is structured and arranged to rest above a suspended ceiling **16**. As used herein the term "suspended ceiling," means a ceiling installed below the structural ceiling or roof of a building and observable from inside the building. An example of a suspended ceiling is shown in FIG. **1** comprising an interlocking support grid **18** and removable ceiling panels **20**, such as acoustic tiles, positionable within the support grid **18**. The support grid **18** may be suspended from the structural ceiling and/or sidewalls of a building frame by support wires, and the support grid **18** can comprise a plurality of horizontal and/or vertical support bars, such as a plurality of horizontal and vertical support bars intersecting at right angles. The structural ceiling can comprise the substantially horizontal support system demarcating a story in a multiple story building, or the flat or angled interior of a building roof. The suspended ceiling **16** typically comprises a finished lower surface structured to face into a room interior and be visible to occupants of the room, and an upper surface which faces the structural ceiling. The leak diverter **10** of the present invention, is structured and arranged to rest above the suspended ceiling **16**, i.e., on top of the upper surface of the ceiling panels **20** or support grid **18**, or suspended from the structural ceiling, such as from support wires and/or metal trusses or pipes.

Referring to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the leak diverter **10** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention comprises a liquid collection tray in the form of a flexible plastic sheet **12** and a drain **14** in fluid communication with the flexible sheet **12**. As used herein, the term "liquid collection tray" means any suitable arrangement for collecting liquid, such as roof leaks, water leaking from piping and/or condensation and the like, which could otherwise fall onto the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **16**. The liquid collection tray can comprise a rigid, semi-rigid and/or flexible sheet of material or preformed container. The flexible sheet and/or preformed container can comprise a polymeric material and/or a metal composition coated to prevent rust and/or corrosion. The liquid collection tray can comprise any suitable shape and size, such as a substantially square or rectangular shape. In one embodiment, the liquid collection tray may be sized differently than the size of a ceiling panel **20**. For example, the liquid collection tray may be smaller in at least one dimension than the standard 24×24 inch or 24×48 inch ceiling panel, or may be larger in at least one dimension than such panels. Alternatively, the liquid collection tray may be sized to approximate the dimensions of a ceiling panel **20**.

Still referring to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the leak diverter **10** comprises a perimeter frame **19** which supports the flexible sheet **12** and a plurality of support members **22** structured and arranged to support at least a portion of the perimeter frame **19**. The support members **22** are structured and arranged to rest on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **16**. In one embodiment, the support members **22** are structured and arranged to rest on one or more ceiling panels. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **1**, the support members **22** are structured and arranged to rest on two ceiling panels which are separated by a central ceiling panel. In another embodiment, the support members **22** are structured and arranged to rest upon the support grid **18** of the suspended ceiling **16**. In yet another embodiment, the support members **22** are structured and arranged to rest upon intersecting horizontal support bars of the support grid **18**. The perimeter frame **19** can comprise any suitable material having sufficient strength to support the flexible sheet **12** when at least partially filled with a liquid. In one embodiment, the perimeter frame **19** comprises lightweight high-strength polymer, metal or wood tubing that can be integrally formed, or separately assembled.

The perimeter frame **19** can have any desired dimensions, such as sized to approximate the dimensions of a ceiling panel or to straddle adjacent panels. In one embodiment, the perimeter frame **19** can have a width W that is smaller than a standard opening within the support grid, e.g., smaller than 24 inches for standard 24×24 inch ceiling panels or 24×48 ceiling panels, in order to facilitate the installation of the leak diverter **10** through the support grid **18** an on to the suspended ceiling **16**. In another embodiment, the perimeter frame **19** has a length L that is larger than a standard ceiling panel dimension, e.g., greater than 24 inches for a 24×24 inch ceiling panel, or greater than 48 inches for a 24×48 inch ceiling panel. For example, in one embodiment, the perimeter frame **19** can have a width W of about 20 inches and a length L of about 30 inches, and can straddle the grid separating at least two adjacent 24×24 inch ceiling panels. This size allows a user to install the perimeter frame **19** in an assembled position, through the support grid **18**, e.g., which has a standard width of 24 inches.

As shown in FIG. **1**, the support members **22** can comprise a plurality of integrally formed or attachable support posts, walls, legs, feet, flanges and the like. In one embodiment, the leak diverter **10** comprises a support member **22** engaged with a corner element **24** at each corner of the perimeter frame **19** of the flexible sheet **12**. In one embodiment, the support posts have a height H of from about 1 inch to about 12 inches, such as from about 6 inches to about 12 inches.

As shown in FIG. **3**, the perimeter frame **19** can comprise multiple disassembled substantially horizontal perimeter bars **30** and multiple corner elements **24** which are capable of being assembled with the support members **22**. The corner elements **24** can comprise a first end **34** for engaging a first perimeter bar end **36** of a substantially horizontal perimeter bar **30** and a second end **38** for engaging a second perimeter bar end **40** of a substantially horizontal perimeter bar **30**. The corner elements **24** can also comprise a third end **42** for engaging a support member **22**. The first end **34**, the second end **38**, and the third end **42**, can be engageable with the first perimeter bar end **36**, the second perimeter bar end **40** and a support member **22** respectively, by any suitable means, such as press-fit, snap means, screw means, and/or fastener means. The perimeter frame **19** can comprise a kit for assembly by a user or can be integrally formed.

Referring again to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the flexible sheet **12** can comprise a top surface **17** that is sloped from the perimeter frame **19** toward the drain **14**. In another embodiment, the top surface **17** of the flexible sheet **12** can be sloped from the perimeter frame **19** toward the drain **14** in more than one direction. The drain **14** can be positioned at any desirable location, such as at the center of the flexible sheet **12**, at a corner of the flexible sheet **12**, and/or along the perimeter frame **19** of the flexible sheet **12**. In one embodiment, the flexible sheet **12** can comprise a plurality of drains **14**. As shown in FIG. **1**, the drain **14** can be positioned at substantially the center of the flexible sheet **12**, and the top surface **17** can be sloped from each side of the perimeter frame **19** toward the drain **14**. In another embodiment, a weight can be positioned in the flexible sheet **12** at about the drain **14**. In this embodiment, the top surface **17** of the flexible sheet **12** is weighted near the drain **14** to allow liquid contacting the top surface **17** of the flexible sheet **12** to flow to the drain **14** without obstruction from other portions of the material comprising the flexible sheet **12**. The drain **14** of the leak diverter **10** can be configured to extend through the flexible

sheet **12**. The drain **14** can comprise any suitable drain configuration, such as an open port, a flow-limiting valve, and/or a reinforced opening. In one embodiment, a drain hose **26** can be connected to the drain **14**.

Referring to FIG. **1**, the drain hose **26** can be positioned under the flexible sheet **12** of the leak diverter **10** and above the suspended ceiling **16**. In one embodiment, the drain hose **26** can be connected to the drain **14** at a location between the flexible sheet **12** and the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **16**, and rest on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **16**. The drain hose **26** can be hidden from view of occupants of the room space located below the suspended ceiling **16**. The drain hose **26** can be connected to any suitable discharge system capable of removing collected liquid from the flexible sheet **12** and passing it to a removal area, such as a collection tank positioned above the suspended ceiling **16**, or discharged to a drain integral to the building piping (not shown).

As shown in FIG. **1** (and in FIG. **3** in the unengaged position), a plurality of perimeter clamps **28** can be positioned over the perimeter frame **19** and the flexible sheet **12** to secure the material comprising the flexible sheet **12** to the perimeter frame **19**. The flexible sheet **12** can be sized to extend beyond the dimensions of the perimeter frame **19** to allow the flexible sheet to overhang the perimeter frame **19**. The perimeter clamps **28** can comprise any suitable material, such as a semi-rigid deformable polymeric material capable of accommodating the shape of the perimeter frame **19** and securing the flexible sheet **12** against the perimeter frame **19**. The perimeter clamps **28** can comprise a generally C-shape tube or a tube having an opening slit running longitudinally along the tube. The perimeter clamps **28** can comprise a plurality of longitudinal grooves to further secure the flexible sheet **12** against the perimeter frame **19**. In another embodiment, a pair of perimeter clamps **28** can be positioned at any location along a segment of the perimeter frame **19**, such as adjacent the corner elements **24**, to secure the flexible sheet **12** to the perimeter frame **19**.

FIG. **4** shows a close-up view of a corner element **24** positioned at a corner of the leak diverter, having a first end **34** engaged with a first perimeter bar end **36** of a substantially horizontal perimeter bar **30** and a second end **38** engaged with a second perimeter bar end **40** of a substantially horizontal perimeter bar **30**. Corner element **24** has a third end **42** engaged with a support member **22**. A perimeter clamp **28** is secured to each substantially horizontal perimeter bar **30** of the perimeter frame. In one embodiment, a liquid collection tray (not shown) is disposed between the perimeter clamp **28** and the substantially horizontal perimeter bar **30** to secure the liquid collection tray to the perimeter frame.

In one embodiment, the liquid collection tray **12** of a first leak diverter **10**, for example, as shown in FIG. **1**, is sized to be larger than the perimeter frame **19** such that a portion of the liquid collection tray **12** can overlap the perimeter frame of a second leak diverter (not shown) positioned adjacent the first leak diverter **10**. In this embodiment, the liquid collection tray **12** of the first leak diverter **10** may be structured for securement by any suitable means such as mechanical fasteners to the perimeter frame **19** of a second leak diverter to provide a larger area of coverage. For example, two or more leak diverters **10** as shown in FIG. **1** may be secured next to each other by overlapping the flexible sheet **12** of one leak diverter with the perimeter frame **19** of an adjacent leak diverter, and using the perimeter clamps **28** to secure the flexible sheet of the first diverter to the frame of the adjacent diverter. In this embodiment, a greater area of leak coverage can be obtained by joining two or more leak diverter units.

In an alternative embodiment, as shown in FIG. **5**, the leak diverter **110** can comprise a liquid collection tray in the form of a rigid or semi-rigid container comprising a preformed material having a top surface **117** that is sloped toward a drain **114**. As shown in FIG. **5**, the leak diverter **110** is structured and arranged to rest on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **116**. The preformed liquid collection tray **112** can have a creased region **150** which has a height H_1, which is less than the height H_2 of the perimeter **119**. In one embodiment, the height H_1 can be from about 0.5 inches to about 4 inches and the height H_2 can be from about the height H_1 plus about 0.5 inches to about 12 inches or more. The creased region **150** can be sloped from a first end **160** to a second end **170** adjacent the drain **114**. The preformed liquid collection tray **112** can be supported at a plurality of locations along the perimeter **119** by a plurality of support members **122**. In one embodiment, the support members **122** are structured and arranged to rest on the ceiling panels **120** of the suspended ceiling **116**. In another embodiment, the support members **122** are structured and arranged to rest on the support grid **118** of the suspended ceiling **116**. In another embodiment, a drain hose **126** can be connected to the drain **114**. The drain hose **126** can be positioned under the preformed liquid collection tray **112** of the leak diverter **110** and above the suspended ceiling **116**. In one embodiment, the drain hose **126** can be connected to the drain **114** at a location between a bottom side of the preformed liquid collection tray **112** and the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **116**, and rest on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **116**.

In another alternative embodiment, as shown in FIG. **6**, a leak diverter **210** can comprise a liquid collection tray in the form of a rigid or semi-rigid container comprising a preformed material having a top surface **217** that is sloped towards a drain **214**. As shown in FIG. **6**, the leak diverter **210** is structured and arranged to rest on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **216**. A bottom surface **266** of the preformed liquid collection tray **212** of the leak diverter **210** is structured to rest directly on the suspended ceiling **216**. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **6**, the bottom surface **266** rests on the support grid **218**. In another embodiment, the corner regions **270** of the leak diverter **210** can be aligned to rest on the support grid **218** of the suspended ceiling **216**.

As shown in FIG. **6**, the preformed liquid collection tray **212** can comprise a plurality of side barriers **260** structured to extend vertically from the top surface **217** of the preformed liquid collection tray **212** to further contain any liquid contacting the top surface **217**. In one embodiment, the side barriers **260** can have a height H_3 of any suitable dimension such as from about 1 inch to about 4 inches or greater. In another embodiment, the drain **214** is structured to extend through a side barrier **260**. In yet another embodiment, the drain **214** can be connected to a drain hose **226** that is structured and arranged to rest on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling **216**.

In any of the above-disclosed embodiments, a splash pad (not shown) made of any suitable material can be optionally placed in the interior of the leak diverter, such as on the top surface of the liquid collection tray, to limit splashing out of the leak diverter. The optional splash pad may be made of a substantially non-absorbent material that reduces splashing but allows the collected liquid to pass through to the drain of the leak diverter.

Whereas particular embodiments of this invention have been described above for purposes of illustration, it will be evident to those skilled in the art that numerous variations of the details of the present invention may be made without departing from the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to rest above and to be supported by the suspended ceiling;

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray; and

a drain hose in flow communication with the drain and a liquid discharge system,

wherein the drain and drain hose are above the suspended ceiling.

2. The leak diverter of claim **1**, wherein the liquid collection tray comprises a flexible sheet of material.

3. The leak diverter of claim **1**, wherein the liquid collection tray comprises a substantially rigid preformed material.

4. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to rest above and to be supported by the suspended ceiling;

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray; and

a plurality of support members structured and arranged to support at least a portion of the liquid collection tray and rest on the suspended ceiling.

5. The leak diverter of claim **4**, wherein the support members are structured and arranged to rest on at least two ceiling panels of the suspended ceiling.

6. The leak diverter of claim **4**, having a width that is less than a width of a ceiling panel of the suspended ceiling.

7. The leak diverter of claim **4**, having a length that is greater than a length of a ceiling panel of the suspended ceiling.

8. The leak diverter of claim **4** further comprising a drain hose connected to the drain.

9. The leak diverter of claim **4**, wherein the liquid collection tray comprises a top surface sloped toward the drain.

10. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to rest above and to be supported by the suspended ceiling;

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray,

wherein the liquid collection tray comprises a side barrier,

wherein the drain extends through the side barrier.

11. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to rest above and to be supported by the suspended ceiling;

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray,

wherein the liquid collection tray is supported by a perimeter frame,

wherein at least one perimeter clamp secures the liquid collection tray to at least a portion of the perimeter frame.

12. The leak diverter of claim **11**, wherein the liquid collection tray comprises a flexible sheet of material and the drain extends through the flexible sheet of material.

13. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to be supported by the suspended ceiling;

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray, wherein the drain is structured and arranged to be positioned above the suspended ceiling;

a plurality of support members structured and arranged to support the liquid collection tray and rest on the suspended ceiling.

14. The leak diverter of claim **13**, further comprising a drain hose connected to the drain.

15. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to be supported by the suspended ceiling; and

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray,

wherein the drain is structured and arranged to be positioned above the suspended ceiling,

wherein the leak diverter has a width that is less than a width of a ceiling panel of the suspended ceiling.

16. The leak diverter of claim **15**, wherein the liquid collection tray comprises a flexible sheet of material and the drain extends through the flexible sheet of material.

17. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to be supported by the suspended ceiling; and

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray,

wherein the drain is structured and arranged to be positioned above the suspended ceiling,

wherein the leak diverter has a length that is greater than a length of a ceiling panel of the suspended ceiling.

18. A leak diverter for positioning above a suspended ceiling comprising:

a liquid collection tray structured and arranged to be supported by the suspended ceiling; and

a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray,

wherein the drain is structured and arranged to be positioned above the suspended ceiling,

wherein the liquid collection tray is supported by a perimeter frame,

wherein at least one perimeter clamp secures the liquid collection tray to at least a portion of the perimeter frame.

19. A leak diverting system comprising:

a suspended ceiling having an upper surface; and

a leak diverter resting on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling;

wherein the leak diverter has a width that is less than a width of a ceiling panel of the suspended ceiling.

20. The leak diverting system of claim **19**, wherein the leak diverter comprises a liquid collection tray positioned above the suspended ceiling, and a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray.

21. The leak diverting system of claim **19**, further comprising a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray, wherein the drain is structured and arranged to be positioned above the suspended ceiling.

22. The leak diverting system of claim **20**, further comprising at least one other leak diverter positioned adjacent to the leak diverter.

23. A leak diverting system comprising:

a suspended ceiling having an upper surface; and

a leak diverter resting on the upper surface of the suspended ceiling;

wherein the leak diverter has a length that is greater than a length of a ceiling panel of the suspended ceiling.

24. The leak diverting system of claim 23, wherein the leak diverter comprises a liquid collection tray positioned above the suspended ceiling, and a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray.

25. The leak diverting system of claim 23, further comprising a drain in flow communication with the liquid collection tray, wherein the drain is structured and arranged to be positioned above the suspended ceiling.

26. The leak diverting system of claim 23, further comprising at least one other leak diverter positioned adjacent to the leak diverter.

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